

VZCZCXRO6948
PP RUEHAST RUEHBI RUEHCI RUEHDBU RUEHLH RUEHNEH RUEHPW
DE RUEHKA #0541 1520319
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 010319Z JUN 09
FM AMEMBASSY DHAKA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8910
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHGO/AMEMBASSY RANGOON PRIORITY 2865
RHHJJPI/PACOM IDHS HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

UNCLAS DHAKA 000541

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [KCRM](#) [BG](#)

SUBJECT: TWO FORMER INTELLIGENCE CHIEFS NABBED FOR ARMS SMUGGLING

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) Police have arrested two former National Security Intelligence (NSI) chiefs on allegations of involvement in an illegal shipment of weapons and ammunition in 2004 believed bound for an insurgent group in northeast India. At the time, the U.S. Government and others pushed for a thorough investigation into the shipment, to no avail. Now, the Awami League government is pursuing the case with great zeal and has indicated it may arrest senior officials from the previous Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) government.

SENSATIONAL CASE

2. (SBU) On May 16, police arrested two former NSI chiefs -- Brigadier General (retired) Abdur Rahim and Major General (retired) Rezzaqul Haider Chowdhury -- from their Dhaka homes. Police immediately drove them to Chittagong for interrogation in connection with a five-year-old case involving the illegal shipment of several truckloads of weapons and ammunition. The 2004 shipment, which was foiled by Chittagong police, reportedly included more than a million bullets, 27,000 grenades and 150 rocket launchers, and may have been bound for the Indian insurgent group United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA). The media criticized the then-BNP government for failing to find out where the shipment came from, where it was going and who paid for it. The government of the day also ignored repeated U.S. Government requests for a thorough investigation into the shipment.

3. (SBU) The recent arrest of the former NSI chiefs followed allegations of their involvement reportedly made by Wing Commander (retired) Shahabuddin, a former NSI director for security who was arrested in the case himself on April 19. (Note: Rahim had been director general of NSI and Chowdhury had been a senior official at military intelligence, the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence, at the time police uncovered the arms shipment; Chowdhury later succeeded Rahim. End note.) Press reports also claimed Shahabuddin implicated Tarique Rahman, former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's eldest son and a leading BNP organizer, and Matiur Rahman Nizami, the chief of Jamaat-e-Islami, Bangladesh's largest Islamist party, who was a cabinet member in the government of the day. State Minister for Home Affairs Tanjim Ahmed indicated the Awami League government was looking into the possible involvement of former officials from the BNP-led government, but he did not name names.

BNP SAYS CASE IS A PARTISAN HATCHET JOB

4. (SBU) BNP spokesman Nazrul Islam Khan told reporters the government was using the 2004 arms case to malign the opposition party. "If the (BNP-led) coalition government itself was involved in the smuggling of the weapons, then why would it spot the shipment

and recover the weapons and institute an inquiry into the case?" he was quoted as saying. Some BNP supporters have argued the arrest of the two former NSI chiefs would affect the morale of intelligence agencies and expose the country to security threats. They claimed the Awami League government's reopening of the case was to curry favor with New Delhi by raising allegations that Khaleda Zia's government had supported insurgents in India's northeast.

COMMENT: CASE OPENS NEW FRONT IN TWO-PARTY WAR

15. (SBU) The reopening of the arms case is likely to continue the intense partisanship between the Awami League government and the opposition BNP. Whatever the legal merits of the arms case probe, it inevitably will be viewed here through the lens of Bangladesh's politics. That said, investigating possible involvement by security agencies and government figures into a massive, illegal arms shipment presumably intended to kill civilians in India is a long overdue step.

MORIARTY